The Melville Society NEWSLETTER

MARCH, 1951

Volume VII Number 1

Twenty-four persons attended the annual meeting held at the New York Public Library on December 28. President Elizabeth Foster introduced Herbert Cahoon of the library staff, who generously welcomed us and announced the library's plan for publication in the spring of a complete list of its Melville holdings. The list is being prepared by Mr. Cahoon.

Howard P. Vincent, general editor of the Hendricks House edition of Melville's works, discussed the progress of the series. **The Confidence-Man** (Foster), **Typee** (Anderson and Roper), and **Moby-Dick** (Mansfield and Vincent) are scheduled for publication during 1951; and **Omoo** (Hayford and Blair) may also be out this year. **Redburn** (Thorp) and **Clarel** (Bezanson) are expected in 1952.

William Gilman presented a report on recent Melville scholarship, including editions, books about Melville, theses and dissertations, articles, and suggestions for further research. He proposed an organized plan of search for biographical facts, letters, diaries, journals, and information about Melville's relatives and friends, each member of the Society to conduct such a search in his own part of the country. He also urged a systematic study of Melville's poetry and the preparation of a new edition of **The Journal up the Straits.**

In the absence of Harrison Hayford, Mr. Vincent spoke on some problems and discoveries relating to **White-Jacket.**

Stuart C. Sherman led a discussion regarding plans for the observance of the **Moby-Dick** centennial. Among suggestions were the following: A dinner meeting of the Society, possibly with Harper & Brothers as co-sponsor, the program to be broadcast over a national radio network; library exhibits in all sections of the country; exhibits of pictures; a national census of Melville materials; a stage presentation of **Moby-Dick;** decoration of Melville's grave in the Woodlawn Cemetery (The Bronx). It was finally agreed that the question of planning an appropriate celebration of the centennial should be left in the hands of the executive committee, with the aid of such additional members as the president may appoint.

William Gilman was elected a member of the executive committee for a five-year term expiring on December 31, 1955. Other members of the committee are as follows: Howard P. Vincent (1951), Willard Thorp (1952), Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953), and Merton M. Sealts (1954). Mr. Vincent is president of the Society during the year 1951, and Tyrus Hillway continues to serve as secretary and editor of the Newsletter (three-year term expiring next December).

The secretary's report gave total membership as 114, of which 6 are honorary members and 2 are foreign scholars. Three libraries now subscribe to the Newsletter. Exchange relations with the Thoreau Society continue. A deficit of $64.84 resulting from purchase of the Sealts check-list from the Harvard University Library was reported. Following discussion, the members voted without dissent to increase annual dues to two dollars.

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MELVILLE EXPLICATOR

It has been proposed that one column of the Newsletter be set aside for questions and explications of difficult passages in the works of Melville. If this proposal does not appear to usurp the functions of that interesting little periodical, **The Explicator,** the editor will be happy to publish any such questions and explications as may be submitted, space permitting. Brief explications of entire works might also be used.

As an example of the kind of information desired, one member states that he would like an explication of the Hotel de Cluny passage in **Moby-Dick** (Ch. 41). What is Melville trying to convey here? Has he mistranslated **palais de thermes** (baths) as Palace of Thermes (a king)?

Should questions and explications submitted prove too numerous for the

pages of the Newsletter, Harrison Hayford has volunteered to issue a mimeograph supplement. The comments of members (or their questions and subsequent explications) are hereby invited.

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BILLY BUDD

After trial runs in Philadelphia and New Haven, a dramatic version of Melville's **Billy Budd** (originally prepared under the title of **Uniform of Flesh**) opened at the Biltmore Theater in New York City on February 10. Charles Nolte played the title role, with Dennis King as Captain Vere and Torin Thatcher as Claggart. Considerable attention was devoted to the play by the metropolitan newspapers. It closed on March 3, but reopened the following week for a run of two more weeks.

Robert Chapman and Louis O. Coxe adapted the play, which will be published in book form by the Princeton University Press in April.

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NOTES

Douglas Sackman reports that William Steinel, a commercial artist in East Rockaway, New York, is at work on a series of paintings (both oil and water color) illustrating **Moby-Dick.**

Italian composer Ghedini's **Concerto del Albatro, after Moby-Dick** was performed on Monday evening, January 8, by the NBC Symphony orchestra, Guido Cantelli conducting. The final movement featured a narration by Ben Grauer (material abridged from n. 5, pp. 178ff. of Thorp's edition of **Moby-Dick.**) Edward Fiess notes quotation to Ishmael.

Stuart C. Sherman of the Providence (R. I.) Public Library is compiling a check-list of all known logbooks of American whaling vessels. He invites information about any logbooks known to members. The check-list will include location of the logbook, name of the vessel and master, home port, rig (bark, ship, etc.), dates of departure and return, and other items of special interest.

Howard C. Horsford is working at Princeton University on the preparation of a new edition of **The Journal up the Straits.**

James W. Schaefle is now in Berlin and has generously offered to do shopping there or to locate Melville items in which any member may be interested. Address him at University of Maryland, McGraw Kaserne, Munich Military Post, APO 407-A, c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y. **Forward,** Mr. Schaefle's unpublished study of the literary criticism of **Moby-Dick** during the past century is now on file in the University of Maryland Library.

Appleton-Century-Crofts is publishing in March **The Literature of the American People,** by Quinn, Murdock, Gohdes, and Whicher. Probable price, $6.50.

G. S. Harvale & Company, 100 Fifth Avenue, New York City, offers for sale a "Great Whale" necktie.

The New York Public Library has recently acquired, through the help of Victor H. Paltsits, additional papers of Allan Melville, Herman Melville's father. These have been added to the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection. They include three A. L. S. to H. A. P. Dearborn, collector of customs in Boston (relating to duties on imported straw hats) and one D. S. granting power-of-attorney to his father, Thomas Melville.

Leon Howard's biography of Melville (University of California Press) is reported as due next fall.

The Nantucket Historical Association will observe the 100th anniversary of **Moby-Dick** with a ceremony to be held on the island about August 1, Melville's birthday. Meetings are to take place in the Friends Meeting House and in the Whaling Museum. The Society has been asked to take some part in the activities.

The publication of Jay Leyda's book on Melville, according to recent reports, has been delayed until the fall.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED QUARTERLY FOR MEMBERS OF THE Melville Society, a group of literary scholars and others interested in the life and works of Herman Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of information among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life and works, and to encourage literary, historical, and bibliographical research. Executive committee: Howard P. Vincent (1951), president; Willard Thorp (1952); Eleanor Melville Metcalf (1953); Merton M. Sealts (1954); William C. Gilman (1955). The annual membership fee of two dollars includes subscription to the Newsletter and other services. Address Tyrus Hillway, secretary, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.